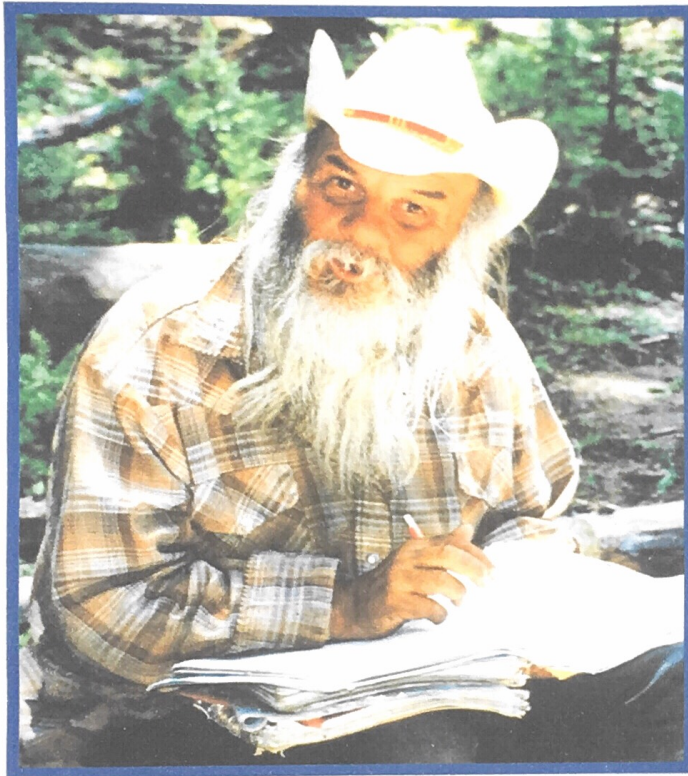




# Rainbow Family Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.  
Interviews with Rainbow  
Family of Living Light  
folks conducted between  
1977 and 2008.  
Scanned in 2018.  
Jodey Bateman may be  
contacted on Facebook.*

04.F SUNNY - "The Plants Messenger"

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SUNNY

People have always trusted me. I'm a trustworthy person - but I don't like talking about myself. I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1951. My father was German and Bohemian lineage. My mother's family was the one I was closest to. That's just how it went. They were Irish. We had a real strong mother hood.

We lived in St. Paul by Hamm's Brewery - oh, God, you'd get these smells from the brewery and from South St. Paul, which was meat packing, you'd get a combination of smells. It was Wop Town and it was also a very heavy Polish neighborhood. I remember we used to have to go to church all the time. My father wasn't Catholic but my mother was very heavy Irish - to the T. The typical stereotype. She didn't have a black shawl, but my grandmother had the black shawl. My grandmother on my mother's side was very tall, very straight, very proud, raised something like ten kids. They were very proud of their heritage. She always had Irish stories, always had something to tell about the homeland. Irish pictures, everything, superstitions. I mean Irish to a T. Pro IRA, you know [Irish Republican Army] - always wanted to go back to Ireland. She died when I was seven. She died at home. I remember the day real well. We all went in and kissed her goodbye and she was dead.

My father worked on the railroad. My mother met him at a bar on Payne Avenue, which is now all strip joints. He went off to the service in World War II. She had my oldest sister when he was gone. He came back and I guess he was a really changed man. He re-signed up and everything, and he was in the service for like eight years so by the time my mother had me, she was 38 because he was gone so many years. When he came back he had a really hard time adjusting. He used to take his sleeping bag and go far away and camp every night. He couldn't sleep indoors and he was real shell-shocked. He was on the front lines. See, they put poor people on the front lines even back then.

He came back and we couldn't find housing, so we lived in Army units the Quonset huts. I remember them so well. I must have been two when we moved in. And there was rows and rows and rows and rows of



Quonset huts and it was all poor people that couldn't find housing when they came back from the service. Summer in Minnesota is so hot and humid and it was all aluminum on the siding. You couldn't touch the siding because the sun would beat down - no trees around and the sandbox was full of wood ticks you'd have to burn out of your hair at night. I remember the families there really well - we all used to play together. The ice man used to come by and he'd throw out chunks of ice to us kids. And I remember these little black kids and Chicano kids and we'd all be running around this big block of ice chunking off chips of it.

And I remember the rag man going through the neighborhood with the horse and the buggy yelling out, "Rags! Rags!" My mother would give him the rags. The rag man and I were real friendly because I was so amazed by his horse. He'd pull me up and I'd ride on his cart with him around the Quonset huts yelling "Rags! Rags!" I had a great time with the rag man.

We lived there until I was about ten in Quonset huts in Wop Town. But it was so heavily with Polish that the Poles wouldn't refer to it as Wop Town. They'd refer to it as this long Polish name. We used to go to church and see all these little Polish women with their babushkas on reciting the rosary in Polish. My early recollections of Catholicism was this very old, old type church, the church we went to, St. Casimir's. It looked like it came from a Polish town. This old church and inside, not ordinary Jesus and Marys, but it looked like Polish Jesus and Marys with their shawls on. The priests were all Polish. The whole service was conducted in Polish. Us kids would sit there, I think that was my early boredom with Catholicism after the fascination with the old Polish women. Not very many Polish men. It was all Polish women, rows and rows with their rosaries. And we'd go after church and have bulia with them - Polish stew.

My mother and my father finally got enough money saved to



put down on a house. The feuding that went on between my mother and my father's brother was incredible because he was rich. When you were rich in our family, it was like you weren't even family. My father's brother was president of Brown and Bigelow. It was like a publishing company. He had a big house and we used to go there on Christmas, and everybody would hate to go because they'd always look down on us because we'd have all our Salvation Army clothes on. My mother still talks about how she couldn't stand those people because my mother and father wanted to borrow \$500 from them to make down on a house and they'd just give her so much shit because she had the audacity to go ask them for the money.

It was in 1964, when I was ten years old, my father was killed on the railroad. He was a switchman. They didn't tell him they were switching tracks, so a train hit him and he was cut in half and died instantly. I remember that night real well - it was December 18, a week before Christmas. My mother had saved up all her pennies to buy us little gifts. It was a knock on the door and this priest came to our house like in the movies. And I remember my mother's wail drifting out through the night. She had a dollar in her pocket - that's all she had, didn't have any money in the bank. She was all freaked out. It was a really awful Christmas.

The only way we survived through that was my mother sued the railroad, which I was really glad she did. I never thought of it - this little woman taking on this corporate giant, the railroad. And it was really an ordeal for us. By the time the case came to court it was late spring. We missed a lot of school and we had to go to court and it was so hot. She found this lawyer that would do it for free and if she won he would only keep 10%. The lawyer used to drive us to court every day. It was in Rochester, Minnesota for some reason, 60 miles away.

We couldn't afford to stay in a hotel, so we had to drive back every day. I remember sitting in a courtroom seeing all these grisly pictures of his body and all his friends would be upon the stand crying and saying it was the company's fault. It made the papers



and they did a settlement. They gave my mother something like \$40,000 for his death. The way they gave it to her, she would get maybe \$2,000 then and then they sent checks every month for our support maybe \$2.00 a month. Out of that money a certain amount was set aside for us when we were 21.

So my mother didn't get that much money, so I remember growing up was a real struggle. My mother never worked outside the home. She was a homemaker to the T. I never understood that and that's why home making is such a problem for me. So is being at home all the time, because my mother was at home all the time. When I came home she was always there. She never dated, she never went out, she was always there for us. Her and my aunt, the one that died, would spend their lives together, didn't have any friends. Actually it was a very sad existence for my mother, which I didn't realize at the time. Her major thrill in life was junking - hitting the second-hand stores and the Salvation Army. That's the only way we could get anything and that's why I'm such a junker.

So my mother, because she was such a heavy Catholic, she really did everything in the world so we would get a Catholic education. I mean, my mother gets the Catholic Worker. She gets all these newspapers from the Catholic Church. I mean, she'd send her last dollar to the Pope if she could, which I thought was totally ridiculous. And maybe it was because it was that heavy, I rebelled so much. I was an early rebel. There were five of us kids. I was the fourth girl.

They really wanted me to be a boy. So that's why they called me Charlotte, which is my real name, so they could call me Charlie. My grandpa called me Charlie and I was pretty much of a tomboy. I lived up pretty much to their notions. My mother sent us first of all to the grade school at St. Casimir's. My sisters got through it OK, but when it came to me, I had a pretty hard time, maybe because of the environment I was in, because I was so sick of Catholicism.



I think until the sixth grade I was a good little girl with my little Catholic uniform on, helping the nuns on Saturdays. Up to then I had wanted to be a nun and everybody was so happy, my mother was so happy. And then one day I had this great vision that I did not want to be a nun. That's when they had those big habits and how the hell could they wear those things in the summer? And that's when I changed my mind. I did not want to wear those heavy black outfits. These nuns - the only part of their whole body that showed were their hands and their nose and a little bit of their eyes. The rest was garb. I decided then that I did not want to wear that uniform.

This one nun had given me this beautiful statue that you could open up at the bottom and I could put my treasures in. They wanted me to put my rosary in it. And I told them one day that I didn't want to be a nun and she wanted her statue back. That's when I said "That's it! If that's the way these Catholics are, I would rather do something different."

So that was my start at bucking as many nuns as I could all through Catholic school. My mother, the poor widow, put us through school. My mother paid a little bit of money and we worked on Saturdays at the school. Most of us wanted to go to public school and have a good time. I had a hard time, I think, because the nuns were so frustrated sexually that they were very, very hard to deal with people. We used to make up stories about how they used to hide behind curtains with the priests.

After school we'd go in and scale the Communion rails and try to get into the Holy Grail that nobody should touch or else you'd go to hell, you know. So I got expelled from grade school in the seventh grade. But they made them take me back because my mother was the widow, you know.

I made it through grade school mainly because of the Chicano family that kind of adopted me. They used to adopt everybody. They had so many foster kids and they had ten kids of their own - like 15 kids in their house. They lived a block away from me and they were called the Rodriguezes. And Mary and Christine Rodriguez were like my best friends. So I spent all my time over there, and they were still heavy Catholic. They were even worse than my family. We'd have to kneel down and say the rosary at the



Rodriguezes when the clock struck six every day. "OK, kneel down and hit the rosary." But we'd do it in Spanish. I thought that was quite exciting. It wasn't like the Polish rosary and it was so boring in English. I would hang out there most of the time and I was known as Charlotte Rodriguez and Carlita.

So I got through grade school and I had to go to Catholic high school, which I really didn't want to do. I remember the first time I went to Catholic high school, I was sitting very quietly in the library and I wasn't thinking of getting into trouble. And I was yanked up by my collar and thrown into this room and the door slammed on me. And I remember this real heavy duty nun, this real short, squat, evil-looking being opened the door. My last name is Brayback. She goes, "You're Brayback. I know you're a Brayback. Your sisters have been here before you. I've come to warn you about your upcoming four years of school. If you dare do anything, this is what's going to happen to you." Slam! I said, "Just wait! I'm gonna do everything to grate these—these sexually frustrated spinster women."

So ever since then I started this reign of terror in high school with a few friends. Most of the girls that went to high school were from nice backgrounds except for a few of us that were bused in—there'd be some black girls and a few of us from my neighborhood. We'd do everything constantly. We'd smoke in the bathrooms and it would just freak them out because now they can smoke in the bathrooms, but back then, that was 1963. I'd get about seven other girls after we'd sleep through class and we'd go to the bathrooms and we'd just puff cigaret after cigaret and we'd open the door and the smoke would just drift through the hall and we'd split. And we'd have little flasks of whiskey to cover our breaths up when we'd smoke. We didn't care if they caught whiskey on your breath, but you'd get kicked out if you got caught smoking. Then we'd go turn on the fire alarm and watch all the fire trucks come to the scene. It was pretty horrendous.



I remember out of the whole four years I only had two nun friends. One was in ninth grade. She was so wonderful. She tried to understand me instead of getting on my case. I was so thrilled with her but it was only like four months. I come back to school, it was like, "Where is she?" and she'd quit. And another nun did the same thing in the eleventh grade and the rest of the nuns, I couldn't stand.

I did everything possible to be expelled. I finally was expelled twice. I was expelled once because I skipped class. This was an authoritarian school. You couldn't even go out of the building. We'd skip class and we'd go to the infirmary and hide under the beds. How boring that was to go to the infirmary and hang out under those dusty beds. Anything to get out of class.

One time the principal of the school - she was like iron hand. We could hear her jack boots marching down the hall. I couldn't stand her. Mother even hated her. Sister Claire was so awful. She came into the room, she'd raise her hands and we'd all stand. She came in one time and I wouldn't stand. She waited and waited and everyone was silent. And I was glaring at her and she was glaring at me and she pointed at me. And when she pointed at you, you'd feel a terror. She must have been related to Hitler. So I got expelled and I was really happy that I got expelled. But my poor widow mother - I got right back into school. They were gonna withhold my diploma.

My mother, because she was alone, we used to get away with a lot. She'd pretend we wouldn't, but she didn't have much choice. There was five teenagers in the house. How much could she control five teenagers? My mother - she was a heavy hand, but she'd get at you by sitting at the kitchen table and crying.

And - we fought like cats and dogs in my family. That's one of our main memories when we get together - we talk about how wonderful our fights were. We were pretty much of a feuding family. We used to have the most outrageous fights. They got vicious! Because my oldest sister didn't like my younger sister, my younger sister didn't



like my other sister, my other sister would pick on me because she was too frustrated because she couldn't get at my other sisters and I'd beat up my brother because I couldn't get at my other sisters. There was always this revolution of fighting going on in the family. It was crazy. We used to run around the house until we caught each other and we'd actually beat each other's heads into the wall and our house had holes in the wall.

The bathroom door was off the hinges because my sister used to call her Jungle Joan if she wanted to pee and she caught me peeing in the bathroom, forget it! She'd put her butt up against the door, the door would be pulled off the hinges and I'd be yanked off the toilet. If my sister Jungle Joan wanted to use the phone, forget using the phone. You were on the phone? Next thing you knew you'd be lifted up by your hair, thrown into the other room. No matter who you were talking to, the phone would be banged down and she'd use the phone very gently after that.

In our house—I think that's why I'm such a roadie, I like to move around, because I didn't have a bedroom. I used to walk around with my pillow and my blanket looking for a place to sleep. Mother had her room and my little brother used to sleep in there. My other sister who was the oldest had her own room. She was Miss Prim, the queen of the house, so she had to have her own room. I used to share her room when I was little, but she got too much for me to handle. She'd lock me out. She was the teenager. She was the one who used to turn off "Axel and the Dogs", the program I was watching, and turn on "Bandstand."

My house used to be the hangout place for all the teenagers because they'd love it. They'd come watch the fights. They'd come in and call my mom Mrs. B. They'd hang out, they'd eat what they want. We always had a million people in our house. There'd always be someone staying overnight. Maybe that's where some of my



insecurity comes from - I never had a room. So I'd walk around with a pillow at night and a blanket. I'd see if somebody would take me into their bed. If not, I'd just lay on the floor downstairs. I'd lay on the couch sometimes, but it was so lumpy you couldn't do it every night. Finally my mother made this little room for me in the basement with all these little water bugs and everything after like four years of this. But I have really fond memories of my teenager years. I loved my sister and my brother, even though we fought like cats and dogs. My brother would get a quarter and I'd take him to the store. I'd buy all the candy and he'd be left crying at the store.

My mother had a brain tumor that burst. I don't blame her after living in that house. Of course she used to escape by drinking. My mother would always have her highballs.

One of the nicest things I remember about high school was sneaking out at night. By then I had given up my bed in the basement and I had a room by the porch. I'd just go out the porch window. It was easy. We used to ride around Minneapolis. That's where I started seeing a different world than my own little world. I'd see crazy-looking people. This was like 1965-66 and we'd go ride around the West Bank and I'd see hippies. I'd hear about hippies, but we were pretty much greasers at the time. I'd see hippies and I'd go "Wow, look at those strange people." We'd go around to all these hot spots.

I remember earlier than that, going out when I was in grade school and seeing the beatniks. There was a place called the Purple Onion. I'd take the bus there on Saturday afternoons. I'd go down this little alley and I'd see this light and I'd walk in and it blew my mind. The only place I ever got any other beatnik influence was by watching "77 Sunset Strip" and seeing Kookie on TV. I'd go in the Purple Onion and it was just like I heard it would be, the strings of beads that would part as you came in and people sitting on stools reading poetry and dressed in black - really sincere people. I used to be just thrilled sitting there all afternoon just hanging out with these people. I'd sit there in the corner and make friends with



some of these older people, I'd listen to what they were talking about. I wouldn't understand it, of course. It was worldly things. But it used to fascinate me. I did it for like five months.

So the same thing later in 1965 and 66, going out riding all night long in a different world from what I was used to. But I'd go back to my world and three or four nights a week we'd go to these dances and hang out with these gangs. And they weren't like heavy New York gangs, but there was a real heavy rivalry between them. There were like the Toads and the Ptarmigans and the Brotherhood. It was an all black gang - and a Chicano gang and the 69'ers. My sister is married to an old 69'er still. It's interesting when I go home to see them we always get into these old 69'er raps - where everybody is. We were thinking of doing a reunion one year. We all had jackets that said "The 69'ers."

My fondest memory was all the dancing that I did. It wasn't just on weekends we'd go to these dances, it was every night. I don't know how we could afford it. We'd trade in pop bottles. We'd go to raise hell. So we'd go out to these dances and there would be fights that would break out. Chairs would go through the windows and it would be pretty outrageous and I thought it was all pretty exciting - just this brash, rebellious young thing that would have to go to high school the next day and face those nuns that I couldn't stand. That's why I'd carry my flask and my cigarettes, cause I was this tough little thing and all these nice little suburban girls could bump into me and look out! I'd wham them.

I just didn't like the Catholic school because all my friends went to the public school. The Catholic school was like a world that I was alien to and I didn't belong and I didn't want to belong. The only reason I went was because of my poor widow mother. I didn't get much of an education. Now when I look back I wish I had taken advantage of it. They offered languages. I could have learned Spanish, I could have learned Latin, but I didn't take them. I just wanted to get out of school, I took home making so I would get



by. I was pretty smart in school, I got all A's, but I didn't really do much studying. I wanted to slide through school and get out and be an airline stewardess.

So we'd hang out with all these outrageous characters. It culminated one night. My best friend's sister was 21. And we were like 16 or 17. We'd go to her house and have all our parties. These guys were like 19, 20, up to 25 years old. So one night we were having a party. Everybody was getting drunk. We had the Toads there and the 69'ers and the Brotherhood and a big fight broke out. People were jumping out of second story windows and sirens were coming. We wanted to get out of there. We went out. I was pretty hooped. I really didn't like what was going on inside. People were all bloody and beer bottles on the head. Somebody got stabbed. It was winter and the snow was all bloody. So I was trying to break up the crowd and the cops were coming. This guy, he lived but he was sick for a long time. We kind of tamed down after that. We'd still go to dances and get in fights, but the stabbers were pretty low. I still kept on drinking, though, and I was doing a lot of speed in high school. I weighed about 100 pounds. I don't know how I got through high school.

I met this guy who was like 23 and I started going to dances with him that were like 30 miles from our house. This guy was a bouncer at a bar. I was 17 and I just fell madly in love. We got in a lot of trouble. I started seeing him and I was still pretty virginal at the time. One time I spent the night with him, and I didn't come back for like two days. I came home and I was expelled right then and there. So I didn't know where I was gonna go or what I was gonna do. I was thinking about going to Minneapolis because of my fascination with these people and the life they were living. But I wanted to finish high school so I went and stayed at a friend's house for about two weeks. Then my mother took me back in again and after that I got expelled from school. But I made it and I started shaping up - a little bit. I was still pretty rowdy. I stopped hanging around with the gang and started not hanging around with anybody, just being with my



friends, mostly my girlfriends.

So I got out of school and started trying to figure out what I wanted to be. I didn't want to be an airline stewardess any more. So I started to go to the University of Minnesota after a pretty raucous summer. So I went to the University and I got into this whole new crowd of people. It was so interesting, so wild and so amazing. That's when I first started dropping LSD from this man I fell in love with at the university

whose name was Loki who gave me the name Sunshine. I was 18. I had the name Sunshine for ten years and then I outgrew it. Sunny is a simple name, very practical.

I didn't really go to school to be academic. I went to turn on, tune in and drop out. We'd trip around the campus and there'd be all these Vietnam protesters and I'd tune in a little and then I'd trip off. I had flowers in my hair. I was a flower child by then. I was living at home, but I brought Loki home one night and my mother was on the way to church and she found us. I got kicked out again. Then I stayed away after that.

So I went and lived in this little commune in Minneapolis. It was my first introduction to the whole thing. And I can still smell the commune. Because all we ate was brown rice. We had all these blue lights all over the house. A lot of political theory went on. After being a rowdy, rebellious teenager I started maturing into another sort of person through this house. I started getting interested in what was going on. We'd have social study classes in high school and talk about Vietnam and I'd see it on TV with all the dead boys and my friends would go to Vietnam. It affected me, but still it didn't hit me in the head until I got all the facts.

So I started getting interested in what was happening in the world and I started losing a lot of my youthness, which was OK, and I started getting really interested in politics at this time. I would still do a lot of LSD and I'd march with flowers in my hair. I did a lot of LSD, like every day. We'd do LSD for breakfast and THC for



lunch and in the evening when we were coming down, we'd do MDA. We were pretty stoned.

But I really started getting interested in the Vietnam war and that's when I started associating with some of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) characters around the university. I didn't last at the university very long. I think I lasted a quarter, two quarters at the most. What they were teaching me at the university was not what I wanted to hear. What

I was learning in Dinky Town and on the West Bank was what I wanted to hear. So I started hanging out with all these characters that were politically involved and that's when I got my first taste of my involvement in politics. We'd have rallies and marches and sit-ins and be-ins and strikes and we'd get involved with the Tenant's Union.

I started traveling at that point. I'd go to Madison with messages and connects. I didn't go to Ann Arbor much. I went to the homes of the people that were radically involved. We would even bypass the SDS offices because we thought they were kind of bureaucratic. I don't like to use the word indoctrinated, but that's where I got really indoctrinated to the policies of the time with these people. So we'd travel a lot. At the same time I'd do a lot of drugs and hang out with the people who were dealing them. We'd hit every rock concert there was in the Midwest, the three day longers. We'd be zombies. We'd do like 20 hits of acid at a time and the wine bottle would be passed around with all the acid in it. Then we'd snort something and we'd drink something and we'd smoke something. Through that consciousness I never had a hard time. I never had bum trips.

I started opening myself up to a lot more than just the politics of the time. I was opening myself up to the meditations of the time, to the astral projections, to Timothy Leary—to a whole vast spectrum of the whole 60's scene. I started seeing what was going on in the world through my acid-colored glasses. I didn't lose that perspective through being a zombie on LSD. And my friends—I'd get letters. They were being killed in



Vietnam. I started getting very angry because of what was happening. At the same time I didn't want to lose my perspective of the beauty of the world either.

We'd go up on these islands and try to radicalize the people there. We did an educational campaign through our trippiness. Most people at that time were either tripped-out flower children or very heavy political. We tried to find a balance in there - this whole group of people. You know, be tripped-out flower children but do a whole educational campaign behind it. We'd go to the rock concerts and we'd be stoned out of our minds but we'd still talk about Vietnam. We'd still make connects in the cities with the SDS chapters and all the other groups that were going on.

So I started going out into the world and I started doing a lot of hitch hiking. I must have been 18 still at the time. This is 1968, '69. My first riot was at the Denver Pop Festival in 1969. I went there with a bunch of people. We had hitch hiked in. I'd been poor all my life and it was the first time I got to see the injustice of it all. Just because we didn't have tickets to get in - there must have been three or four hundred of us standing outside the gates waiting to get in at the rock festival. So a few people started getting real agitated and trying to tear down the gate. So we all started trying to tear down the gate.

I got to see all the madness involved in a riot. They brought out all the cops and the tear gas and Mace and they turned it on us. I remember all these little kids were in the crowd. They were all getting tear gassed. I think that was my first taste of Shanti Sena. Instead of me being real angry at the police and throwing things back at them, which normally happened in those days, I tried to save these kids and talk to the police - "Why are you throwing tear gas at us?" - and kind of mediate there, although my eyes were flooding - a pepper gas and tear gas combination both.